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BODY AND TRANSCENDENCE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF AND CLARICE LISPECTOR

Corpo e transcendência em Virgínia Woolf e Clarice Lispector

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ABSTRACT: Virginia Woolf and Clarice Lispector belong to quite different historical, political and cultural contexts. Beyond its antecedents and roots in European modernism, Brazilian modernism developed according to peculiar patterns and lines, cultivating, for example, more clearly political, nationalist and regionalist tendencies than happened in the British area. Molly Hiteôs essay ñVirginia Woolfôs Two Bodiesò suggests the existence of two kinds of body represented and perhaps experienced by Virginia Woolf: ñone kind was the body for others, the body cast in social rolesò, the other, the ñvisionary bodyò, a second physical presence, which brings into play new perspectives on the female modernist body and new strategies of political and aesthetic representation. It is this ñvisionary bodyò, that, in many moments, intersects with transcendence. These two kinds of body are also present in Clarice Lispectorôs work, structured, of course, around other complexities and gradations, explained by a different temporal context, but still touching common seminal questions. In Lispector, it is through the body cast in social roles that you reach the ñvisionary bodyò and transcendence. The movement is not a flight, as in Woolf, on the contrary it is a necessity, a condition to get to the essence.

Keywords: social body; visionary body; transcendence

RESUMO: Virginia Woolf e Clarice Lispector pertencem a contextos históricos, politicos e culturais bastante diferentes. Para além dos seus antecedents e raízes no modernismo europeu, o modernismo brasileiro desenvolveu-se em função de padrões e linhas próprios, cultivando, por exemplo, tendências regionalistas, nacionalistas e políticas de forma mais clara do que aconteceu no contexto britânico. O ensaio de Molly Hite ñVirginia Woolfôs Two Bodiesò sugere a existência de dois tipos de corpo representado e talvez vivido na realidade por Virginia Woolf: ñum, o corpo para os outros, o corpo inserido em papéis sociaisò, o outro, o ñcorpo visionárioò, uma segunda presença física, que põe em jogo novas perspectivas sobre o corpo modernista feminino e novas estratégias de representação estética e política. É este ñcorpo visionárioò que em muitos momentos se cruza com o transcendente. Estes dois tipos de corpo estão também presentes na obra de Lispector, estruturada, claro, à volta de outras complexidades e gradações, explicada por um contexto temporal diferente, mas tocando ainda questões seminais comuns. Em Lispector é através do corpo inserido em papéis sociais que se atinge o ñcorpo visionárioò e o transcendente. O movimento não é uma fuga, como em Woolf, mas pelo contrário, uma necessidade, uma condição para chegar à essência.

Palavras-chave: corpo social; corpo visionário; transcendente

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> This monster, the body, this miracle, its pain, will soon make us taper into mysticism or rise, with rapid beats of the wings, into the raptures of transcendentalism. (WOOLF, 1994)
> Todo o seu corpo e sua alma perdiam os limites, misturavam-se, fundiam-se num só caos suave e amorfo, lento e de movimentos vagos como matéria simples e viva (LISPECTOR, 1944).

Virginia Woof and Clarice Lispector belong to quite different historical, political and cultural contexts. Beyond its antecedents and roots in European modernism, Brazilian modernism developed according to peculiar patterns and lines, cultivating, for example, tendencies more clearly political, nationalist and regionalist than happened in the British area. Massaud Moisés in his *História da Literatura Brasileira* (MOISÉS, 1993) considers that the movement developed along three periods: the first moment (1922-1928) begun with The Modern Art Week and the group of Mário de Andrade; the second (1928-45) marked by formal maturity and the appearance of social north eastern novel; the third (from 1945) defined by the renewal of fiction prose including names like Clarice Lispector and João Guimarães Rosa. What brings then Woolf and Lispector together? First, two main writing techniques: the use of the stream of consciousness with different methods and the tendency to experimentalism. Besides these two central similarities many others could be mentioned: the study of female characters and gender questions, the relationship to their own writing, the notion of epiphany, the reflexive mood of narrative, the constant interrogation about the essence of life, the trip to the inner self and the use of the body as symbol. These relationships have been studied by different authors. Ana Luiza Andrade develops the comparison between masculine and feminine perceptions of the world ç ñA escritura feita iniciação feminina: Clarice Lispector e Virginia Woolfò (ANDRADE, 1986) ç; Christine Froula studies gender in the perspective of Genesis ç ñRewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth Century Textsò (FROULA, 1988) ç; Julie Smith-Hubbard argues that Woolfôs alternative aesthetics anticipates Lispectorôs experimental writing ç ñWomenôs rights and womenôs writingò (SMITH-HUBBARD, 2007) ç Elizabeth Lowe compares epiphany and the vision of the city in the two authors ç ñVirginia Woolf y Clarice Lispector ï un estudio comparativoò (LOWE, 1984) ç; Terry Palls explores their use of literary epiphany in short stories çñThe Miracle of the Ordinary: Literary Epiphany in Virginia Woolf and Clarice Lispectorò (PALLS, 1984) ç; Paulo Nolasco dos Santos deals with the ñwritingly existenceò of both authors ç ñClarice

Lispector e Virginia Woolf: a escritura depondo o romancistaò e ñClarice Lispector e Virginia Woolf: a desescritura do realò (SANTOS, 1988; SANTOS 2007) ç Rosa Simas compares the narrative technique of the two authors ç ñPescando a entrelinhaò ï a técnica narrativa de Clarice Lispector e de Virginia Woolfò (SIMAS, 1987) ç Alda Correia compares the poetic writing ç ñ*The Waves* de Virginia Woolf e *Água Viva* de Clarice Lispector ï do romance ao poema em prosaò (CORREIA, 2001) ç and the mutability of narrative identities in both authorôs novels ç òMutating Identities: Clarice Lispectorôs *Um Sopro de Vida ï Pulsações* and Virginia Woolfôs *Between the Acts*ò (CORREIA, 2006).

Criticism on Woolfôs response to experiences of the body has been extensive and sometimes very strongly expressed. Some critics have seen her prose as incorporeal, unworldly, alienated, preoccupied with the transcendent and distant from everyday life; others have questioned this notion**,** arguing that she was concerned with multiple sexualities and that she presented the body as a necessary tool for understanding the moment of being and the sensation, then using these to show spiritual insights and knowledge. Molly Hiteôs essay ñVirginia Woolfôs Two Bodiesò (HITE, 2000) suggests the existence of two kinds of body represented and perhaps experienced by Virginia Woolf: ñone kind was the body for others, the body cast in social roles and bound by the laws of social interactionò, the other, the ñvisionary bodyò, ña second physical presence in fundamental respects different from the gendered body constituted by the dominant social orderò, which brings into play new perspectives on the female modernist body and new strategies of political and aesthetic representation. As Molly Hite says**,** ñWoolfôs visionary body was designed to help evade the snares that identity set for the middle class English woman, offering an inviolable place for momentary but definitive experienceò. It is this ñvisionary bodyò, that, in many moments, intersects with transcendence. These two kinds of body are also present in Clarice Lispectorôs work, structured, of course, around other complexities and gradations, explained by a different temporal context, but still touching common seminal questions. In the Brazilian writer, it is through the body cast in social roles that you reach the ñvisionary bodyò and transcendence. But this movement is not a flight, as in Woolf, on the contrary it is a necessity, a condition to get to the essence.

I suggest that although there are two bodies in the work of both writers, they take different paths to reach their final aim. Two perspectives of the body enable the comparison between the two works: the conflicts of the body and the sexed body.

Conflicts of the body

In the essay ñOn Being Illò published in 1926 (WOOLF, 1994, p. 317-19) Woolf suggests that, though the body is usually neglected by literature, it intervenes day and night as a pane through which the creature gazes. She adds that people usually write about the doings of the mind and ñignore the body in the philosopherôs turretò. It is in this same sense that she talks about the shock-receiving capacity in the essay ñA Sketch of the Pastò (WOOLF, 1982a), p. 74-162), emphasizing the importance of the physical experience of the moment. More than thinking about the body *lato sensu*, Woolf reflects on the gendered and the female body in the essay ñProfessions for Womenò (WOOLF, 1970, p. 235-42) and in *A Room of Oneôs Own* (WOOLF, 1985). In the first she confesses that she has difficulty in telling the truth about her own experience as a body, in the second she states that a womanôs body, determining her social role**,** is impeditive of the development of the creativity of the artist and the writer. Bloomsbury was perhaps the main place where she had the opportunity to mature these points of view, as it offered total intellectual freedom to its women in a physical space which was shared by both sexes on equal terms. It became, in a way, the site of the bodyôs cultural legitimation, a route into the mind[2], which could be subject to analysis like any other question. Later, in her Diary, Woolf wrote that the sequel to *A Room of Oneôs Own* was going to be ñabout the sexual life of womenò (WOOLF, 1983a), p. 6) and in a letter to Ethel Smyth she recognized that womenôs sexual life is usually blacked out and talking about it is a painful operation (WOOLF, 1983b), p. 459-60). These conflicts, clearly connected with the first type of body I mentioned, the one cast in social roles, are visible in works such as Woolfôs *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) or Lispectorôs ñA Imitação da Rosaò (1960) [The Imitation of the Rose] and *Perto do Coração Selvagem* (1943) [Near to the Wild Heart].

The most appropriate frame within which to analyse these questions in the narratives is the theorization of authors such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray or Hélène Cixous, whose common ground ï the analysis of western culture as essentially oppressive and male-centred - I would like to emphasize. The ñheò, associated and identified with the mind (whereas ñwomanò is associated with the body) is the integrated and primary source in regard to which the rest of the world is defined. He is, in Luce Irigarayôs words, characterized by identity, coherence and linearity in contrast with the fluidity, open-endedness, circularity and multiplicity of voices of the female (IRIGARAY, 1980, p. 76). Rational and intellectual

[2] See Juliet Dusinberre, *Virginia Woolfôs Renaissance ï Woman Reader or Common Reader?* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997) 192-226 and Barbara Fassler, ñTheories of Homosexuality as Sources of Bloomsburyôs Androginy,ò *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5.2 (1979), 237-51.

aspirations have been in direct opposition to qualities typical of the female, and women who have them are asked to transcend their bodies, forgetting that the perceiving mind is an incarnate body (Merleau-Ponty). Culture and language materialize this power contaminating even the brain of those who are being rejected. Adrienne Rich writes that ñfear and hatred of our bodies has often crippled our brainsò (RICH, 1976, p. 290-91) and this happens whether in the brainôs productions, the writerôs texts, or even in feminist criticism[3].

In Woolfôs *The Voyage Out*, Rachelôs deep conflict is sited between her intellectual abilities and an education which neither values womenôs intellect nor allows the womanly body fully to assume its existence. It is this division that will symbolically lead Rachel to illness and death. As her health condition grows more serious, she withdraws from memory, life and relations with other people, concentrating only on a high perception of her body, now split from her mind:

> The recollection of what she had felt or of what she had been doing and thinking three days before, had faded entirely. On the other hand, every object in the room, and the bed itself, and her own body with its various limbs and their different sensations were more and more important each day. She was completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body (WOOLF, 1982 b), p. 337).

This conflict is integrated in the larger mother-daughter conflict, in which the dominant patriarchal culture is conveyed by older and castrating women, an attitude symbolized by the frequent reference to knives and scissors. Helen is the centre of this tendency, the most important of the aunts; she is a very powerful woman, seen as ña great commanderò (WOOLF, 1982 b), p. 126), ña figure large and shapeless against the skyò (WOOLF, 1982 b), p.290), capable of spinning the fate of others. Rachel ñalways submitted to her father, just as they did, but it was her aunts who influenced her reality; her aunts who built up the fine, closely woven substance of their life at homeò (*Ibid*, p. 218). Images of the older womenôs castrating tendency appear frequently. In her final set of hallucinations Rachel sees ñan old woman with a knifeò and ñan old woman slicing a manôs head off with a knifeò (*Ibid*, p. 340 and 346). Blooming flowers are cut and chickens are decapitated. Men are admired by women (ñThe men always are so much better than the womenò - *Ibid*, p. 46) and women tend to devalue each other. When, at the end of chapter 22, Rachel suggests to Terence that they break off their ñdamnable engagementò, they feel they had grown larger and stronger, but, when standing in front of the looking-glass, ñthey were really very small and separate, the size of the glass leaving a large space for the reflection of other thingsò. Their body shapes reflect here a mind conflict which Rachel will not be able to overcome.

[3] ñSomatophobiaò, the fear and disdain for the body is studied by Elizabeth Spelman in *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

Lispectorôs *Perto do Coração Selvagem* [Near to the Wild Heart] presents the same basic conflict as *The Voyage Out*, but this time Joana, the protagonist, goes through a liberating evolution which starts with the discovery of her body in the bath, and develops in parallel with her spiritual growth and her realization of who and what she is ï ñE foi tão corpo que foi puro espíritoò [And she was so much body that she was pure spirit[4]]. Though she starts from a traditional marriage, Joanaôs concerns about the freedom of her body are revealed from the beginning of her relationship with Otávio, her husband-to-be ï ñComo ligar-se a um homem senão permitindo que ele a aprisione? Como impedir que ele desenvolva sobre seu corpo e sua alma suas quatro paredes? E havia um meio de ter as coisas sem que as coisas a possuíssem? [How to relate to a man unless by allowing him to imprison her? How to prevent him from developing his four walls over her body and her soul? And was there a way to have things without being possessed by them?] (LISPECTOR, 1995, p. 40). Bathing, one of the rituals which seals the most important acts of life, and which may also suggest regeneration and fertilization, is used here to emphasize Joanaôs emotional and physical puberty crisis and her self-discovery through the body: ñO que deve fazer alguém que não sabe o que fazer de si? Utilizar-se como corpo e alma em proveito do corpo e da alma? (*Ibid*, p. 81) [What should someone do, who doesnôt know what to do with herself? Do use oneself as body and soul in favour of the body and the soul?] At the beginning of the second part, Joanaôs unsatisfactory marriage to Otávio is revealed. She feels that knowing of his existence has left her without freedom and that he has stolen everything from her, mainly her time. She understands that she is going to leave him**,** and his relationship with Lídia is the opportunity to do it. Earl Fitz points out that Joanaôs sexual arousal with Otávio is poorly described in contrast to the affirmations of her physical plenitude, power and freedom. These go through a progression from ñsuggestive to openly sensual imageryò, which, ñthough never explicitly sexual (é) is dominated by powerful female body imagery and by an overwhelming, if as yet inchoate, sense of female power and psychosexual pleasureò (FITZ, 2001, p. 68):

> O deslumbramento que lhe viera do seu próprio corpo descoberto. A renovação fora sua, ela não transbordara até o homem e continuara isolada. (...) Sentia o mundo palpitar docemente em seu peito, doía-lhe o corpo como se nele suportasse a feminilidade de todas as mulheres (LISPECTOR, 1995, p. 40).
> [She had been fascinated to discover her own body. The renewal had been hers, she had not given herself rapturously to this man and had remained isolated (...) She could feel the world gently throbbing in her breast, her body ached as if it were bearing the femininity of all women].[5]

[4] Clarice Lispector, *Perto do Coração Selvagem* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves Ed, 1995), 112. All the translations are mine, except when indicated.
[5] Translation: Giovanni Pontiero (*Near to the Wild Heart*, New York, New Directions, 1990).

What she experiences with Otávio is always presented from the point of view of her bodyôs development and as a way to take possession of herself, of her identity, composed of a sexual body and a psyche. The two last chapters show her desire, the autonomy of her body, the importance of language in the process and her arrival at freedom, at her own truth, at a completion and fulfilment which includes her ñincomprehension of herself in certain white momentsò (LISPECTOR, 1995, p. 224) all of which leave the character very close to Kristevaôs *jouissance*. Ellen Douglass suggests a similar, though structurally different, evolution for Joana completed in three stages: the heroineôs quest, in which Joana is forced to become a woman; the female heroôs quest, in which she acts out the story of the male hero; and the feminist quest, in which Joana moves towards ñgenderlessnessò and a ñdynamic self-multiplicityò(DOUGLASS, 1990, p. 44.64). If we consider that Joana and Rachel represent conflicted subjects, in the sense of Kristevaôs concept of ñsubject in processò, we may say that Woolfôs character is destroyed because the semiotic disruptions in her are much more violent than in Joana, whose distance from this mode of signification is shorter.

Mrs. Dalloway is one of Woolfôs works which most extensively deals with social issues, namely those related to the body or, according to Hite, the body cast in social roles. It discusses the awareness the characters have of it and their reaction of acceptance or refusal, according to their age and social position. Clarissaôs relationship with her body reveals much of the anxiety present in Woolf and in her epoch about the female body. The references to Clarissaôs chastity, her coldness in marriage, even her love for Sally, show, according to Kitsi-Mitakou (~~KITSI-MITAKOU~~, 1977), the protagonistôs conflict between virginity and maternity or, from Patricia Moranôs (~~MORAN~~, 1996) point of view, the fear of corporeal existence. Conflict and the same fear are also the key words in Septimus Smith and Doris Kilmanôs connection with their bodies. Septimusôs inability to feel, ñthe sin for which human nature had condemned him to deathò (WOOLF, 1996, p. 69) affects his sexuality and his relation with others. In Doris Kilman, Woolf questions the stereotype of the beautiful woman, the marginalization of lower class women and the conflicting answers to this situation. Miss Kilman takes refuge in her passions for food and religion, her pride in her degree in and knowledge of modern history, in her feelings of resentment for Clarissa and love for Elizabethôs beauty and youth. Compared by other people to ñearly dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water and garden liliesñ (*Ibid*, p. 100), delighted with her freedom, Elizabethôs beautiful body represents the change from girlhood to maturity but also goes a step further beyond the body (for others) of Miss Kilman and her mother. Bored with the parties she has to go to, Elizabeth is determined to have a profession as a doctor or farmer.

A conflicting relation with the body, and particularly the attempt to deny it**,** is the main theme of Lispectorôs short story ñA Imitação da Rosaò(LISPECTOR, 1989, p. 31-47). Like Clarissa, Laura is a conventional housewife who dreams of perfection, of the ñluminosa tranquilidadeò [luminous tranquility] (*Ibid*, p. 43) of someone who is superhuman. To overcome a madness different from Septimusôs who could not feel, she needs to feel human, exhausted and perishable, far from superhuman. Lauraôs conflict is intense because her urge to state her individuality, independence and brilliant isolation (*Ibid*, p. 34) collides with a normality established by obedience to social definitions in a world dominated, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, by a certain conditioning of its members. The daily glass of milk the doctor recommended becomes the symbol of this imposition and functions at the same time as a rescuer for Lauraôs intranquility.

The most evident sign of Lauraôs problem is the camouflage of her body and the difficulty in accepting one of her physical characteristics, her large, squat thighs. The clothes she wears make her figure diffuse and discreet, ñcastanha como achava que uma esposa devia serò [brown as she believed a wife should be] (*Ibid*, p. 37): the brown dress, the cream lace collar which gives her a child-like appearance, the brown eyes, the brown hair, the smooth, brown skin, a modest air of womanliness (*Ibid*, p. 32). When Armando, the husband, comes home he expects to find her ñchatinha, boa e diligenteò [dull, good and industrious] (*Ibid*, p. 46) but, unable to resist the beauty of the roses she has become ñluminosa e inalcançávelò [luminous and beyond reach] (*Ibid*, p. 47). Seeing her he feels ashamed: ñNo instante seguinte, desviou os olhos com vergonha pelo despudor de sua mulher que, desabrochada e serena, ali estava ñ[The next moment, he looked away, ashamed because of the lack of modesty of his wife, who, in full bloom and serene, was there] (*Ibid*, p. 47). Laura succeeds in blooming, thus imitating the roses.

When the author places Laura between the anxiety of an ordinary existence and the desire for the aesthetic and mystic experience of the essence, she is also contrasting the stereotyped, submissive, insignificant and socially formatted woman with the woman who has the courage to be different and to let herself be tempted by perfection, isolating herself from others and society. What is interesting is that the difficult path from existence to essence or to transcendence is attempted by a female character through the exploration of her gender role limitations. Roses are connected to Christian iconography ï they represent the chalice that collects Christôs blood, the transfiguration of the drops of this blood and Christôs wounds. Outside the Christian tradition they stand for perfection, a faultless accomplishment and is something which may be contemplated as a mandala or a mystic centre (CHEVALIER,

1982). Marta de Senna (~~SENNA~~, 1986, p. 159-165) refers to the fact that the roses are ñpink in hue, almost white, though óone could sense the redness circulate inside themôò. She remembers that ñred and white, components of pink, have a traditional symbolic value, integrating the sacred and the profane, passion and purity, transcendental love and divine wisdom. The synthesis of such contraries, pink, is perfectionò. *The Imitation of Christ* represents the model of perfection, of union with the transcendent, and the roses are the materialization of the mystical treatise in the day-to-day life of the character. Trying to imitate the rose is trying to reach something other than the experience of ordinary existence that is required from the bodily attitude of a housewife. Both Laura and Clarissa Dalloway live conflicting relations with their bodies and unsatisfying attachments to their husbands; both proclaim the essential isolation of each human being and the failure of language and both try to find a sense of totality beyond themselves, Clarissa in the impersonality of the party, Laura in the impersonality of perfection (LISPECTOR, 1989, p. 34).

The sexed body: Male and Female

In *To the Lighthouse* and *A Maçã no Escuro* [The Apple in the Dark] male and female bodies are used both from a social and a visionary perspective. Their interaction leads the characters to transcendence through different processes. A number of studies have interpreted the physical attributes of the Ramsays as a description of sexual warfare. Annis Prattôs (~~PRATT~~, 1981, p. 143-153) analysis**,** however, uses this perspective to argue that there is a ñstrange reversal of the standard masculine and feminine patternsò, especially in sections 7 and 11 of The Window. Her starting point is the erotic imagery used in this description of Mrs. Ramsay:

> Mrs. Ramsay, who had been sitting loosely, folding her son in her arm, braced herself, and, half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again), and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy (...) to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life (WOOLF, 1992, p. 34-35).

Pratt argues that though she is presented as a feminine model, many sets of images ascribe masculine physical reactions to Mrs. Ramsay, associating her with a fountain of life. On the other hand Mr. Ramsay is usually associated with barrenness and destructive sterility. At the conclusion of the section we have Mr. rather than Mrs. Ramsay filled with the fluid of creation, while her response to the experience is ambivalent. In section eleven, alone and

under the power of the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay achieves her moment of ecstasy in a description which combines sexual overtones (silver fingers, strokes of light) and a description of female strength. Annis Pratt, therefore, draws our attention to a certain inversion of the traditional characteristics of the gender roles, and of course, to the androgyny of Mrs. Ramsay. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Lily reaches her vision by ñlosing consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or notò (WOOLF, 1992, p. 136). This passing of power from Mrs. Ramsay to Lily reinforces the importance of the discussion about art in the novel and may lead to the transition of a social body (Mrs. Ramsayôs in her role as wife and mother) to a visionary body which tries to define itself by the former, but will only assert itself with the latter. If we consider, as does Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, that *To the Lighthouse* is a turning point in Woolfôs work in a progression from a patriarchal image of the body to a new image of the female body defined by female experience, the death of Mrs. Ramsay could reinforce this transition. Molly Hite says about it:

> The two moments in ñThe Windowò invite us to compare two distinct modes of sexuality. In the passage dealing with the strokes of the lighthouse we see a metaphorized, linguistically incarnated sexuality that is hermetically contained within the body. In the description of Mrs. Ramsayôs ósprayingô Mr. Ramsay, we observe a linguistically incarnated sexual performance that, in being shared, spends itself. The visionary body experiences rapture. The social body undergoes evacuation and, eventually, death (HITE, 2000, p. 6).

Mrs. Ramsay, as a woman, ñrepresents the body, that substratum of materiality without which her husbandôs abstract creations could not exist but which also threatens to frustrate themò (MINOW-PINKNEY, 1987, p. 93). The house may also stand for the body of the mother, the figure of an entire social order (*Ibid*, p. 98). However, in some privileged moments, as when she watches the strokes of the lighthouse, she is capable of attaining a certain transcendence of materiality in a very solid and personal manner. This visionary body will assert itself, as has been said, in Lily and her attitude towards life and art. Her body, free from maternity and love attachments is ñurged by a curious physical sensationò(WOOLF, 1992, p. 135) to paint. At the same time she wonders how to express in words these emotions of the bodyò (*Ibid*, p. 151). After questioning herself anxiously she assumes that ñnothing stays, all changes; but not words, not paintò (*Ibid*, p. 152); she is now ready to draw the final line in the centre of her painting.

Randi Koppen goes beyond this gendered/socially-situated discussion of the body and draws attention to the centrality of the experiencing body and the ñthematization of a dialectic between art/aesthetic vision and the experiencing body in a move which ógroundsô

art without denying its alterity or its cognitive potential. Transcendence is located in a body in space and mediated through that bodyôs physical, kinetic experiences, including its relation to inanimate objectsò (KOPPEN, 2001, p. 375-89). In Lilyôs experiments in painting, the body is transformed out of existence, related to other bodies, objects and masses in space, connected with the rhythms of the physical, spatial world, to perform an artistic act which leads to an aesthetic and transcendent vision.

The body is also in Lispectorôs *A Maçã no Escuro* [The Apple in the Dark] the first level of the protagonistôs quest for a new self. Martim, one of the few male heroes in Lispectorôs novels, starts living through the senses, trying to be organic, avoiding the act of thinking:

> E porque aquele homem parecia não querer nunca mais usar o pensamento nem para combater outro pensamento ï foi fisicamente que de súbito se rebelou em cólera, agora que enfim aprendera o caminho da cólera. Seus músculos se comprimiram selvagemente contra a imunda consciência que se abrira ao redor da unha. Ilógico, lutava primitivamente com o corpo, torcendo-se numa careta de dor e de fome, e com voracidade ele todo tentou se tornar apenas orgânico (LISPECTOR, 1992, p. 44).
> [And because that man seemed not to want to think ever again, not even to fight another thought ï it was physically, all of a sudden, that he rebelled, in ire, now that he had learned the ways of ire, at last. His muscles compressed savagely against the filthy consciousness which had opened around his nail. Against logic, he fought primitively with his body, twisting in a grimace of pain and hunger, and voraciously, his whole body tried to become organic only.]

When he arrives at the farm, after an act of transgression and a rupture with social order, he tills the earth and begins to feel a part of it. Wandering through the primordial darkness, surrounded by silence, he concludes that all he can do is look and perceive his own existence while recognizing other organic things around him: rocks, plants, animals (the cows with which he feels identified) and later, women. Reflexivity spoils spontaneity and Martim gets lost when he starts thinking. The smell of matter draws him through the body to the essential body of things. This essence of being, the final aim of the characterôs search for salvation, starts with the simplest experiences of his body.

At a second stage in his development Martim establishes different types of relationship with the three women of the farm. They are a part of his evolution, helping him to make the transition between his former experiences and the ñimaterial addition of himselfò (*Ibid*, p. 311) he wants to create. The opposition between male and female is from now on frequently built up and destroyed as can be seen in this example from the end of the first part:

> Mas pareceu entender para que nascem mulheres quando uma pessoa é um homem. E isso foi um tranquilo sangue forte que entrava e saía ritmado no seu peito. Tratando das vacas, o desejo de ter mulheres renasceu com calma. Ele o reconheceu logo: era uma espécie de solidão. Como se seu corpo por si mesmo não bastasse. (...) Lembrou-se que mulher é

> mais que o amigo de um homem, mulher era o próprio corpo do homem. (...) o mundo era masculino e feminino (*Ibid*, p. 102-3).
> [But he seemed to understand what women are born for when a person is a man. And that was a peaceful strong blood pulse that rhythmically entered and came out of his chest. Seeing to the cows, the desire to have women peacefully reappeared. He recognized it immediately: it was a kind of solitude. As if his body was not enough in itself. He remembered that a woman is more than a manôs friend, a woman was manôs own body. The world was male and female.]

Martim has different perceptions of the body of the three women in relation to his own. With the servant he finds himself through her body (ño que ela suscitava num homem era ele próprioò (*Ibid*, p. 101) [what she called forth in a man was himself]). The love relationship with Ermelinda, though including sex, is not centred in the body. There are references to love on the part of both elements of the couple, submission, possession and to the fact that she compensates for the difficulty Martim has been having with himself (*Ibid*, p. 174). In fact, a good part of the chapters which follow the experience with Ermelinda concentrate on other, very important themes of the novel such as the use of the word and writing, their limits and the use of the sentence as something that touches the essence of life. Ermelinda insists on asking about the mysteries of life and death and at the beginning of Part Three she is said to have stopped loving him. When she ñhas the idea of herself as if she saw herselfò (*Ibid*, p. 234) she thinks about death and the connection between love, death and the body. And now, feeling helpless when she understands the human condition in her, she loves Martim again. The coming together of male and female is for the Lispectorian body a microscopic search for the essence. In their own and in the otherôs body the characters look for the breath of life:

> Fechou intensamente os olhos, entregando-se toda ao que havia de inteiramente desconhecido naquele estranho, ao lado do mínimo conhecível que era o seu corpo vivo ï ela se colou àquele homem sujo com terror dele, eles se agarraram como se o amor fosse impossível. (...)
> E agora os dois estavam abraçados na cama como dois macacos no Jardim Zoológico e nem a morte separa dois macacos que se amam (*Ibid*, p. 233).
> [She closed her eyes intensely giving herself up to what there was of entirely unknown in that stranger, close to the minimum that could be known which was his living body ï she clung to that dirty man in terror of him, they clung together as if love was impossible. (...)
> And now they were clasped together in bed like two monkeys in the Zoo and not even death separates two monkeys which love each other.]

In Part Three Martimôs experimental period ends. He will now come closer to Vitória, the owner of the farm and the mistress of the house. As Hélène Cixous says, what happens between Ermelinda and Martim occurs on the level of the body with as little symbolization as possible, while the exchange with Vitória is all in words. Both experiences are partial (CIXOUS, 1990, p. 83). When Martim is aware of the failure of his search but at the same time of his reconstruction as a person, we perceive Vitóriaôs revelation of herself, in

parallel, as a woman. Unexpectedly we understand that both have a personal history of victory and failure, both struggle in different fields. Love is never an issue between the two and not a word do they utter (*Ibid*, p. 66) but there is an implicit**,** strong love between them. In different symbolic moments, when they are alone, using free indirect discourse, Martim and Vitória acknowledge for the first time, timidly, the love they feel for their own self. The body, far from being used in a direct erotic dimension which is, nevertheless, present in Martimôs and Vitóriaôs dialogue/words, stands once more for life, our life, the life of the other, ñthe lust of being aliveò (LISPECTOR, 1992, p. 224) felt by Vitóriaôs body. This is clear when, confounded by her body, she tries to understand how it works (Ibid, p. 222). As Vitória tells her story and confesses many of her intimate thoughts and fears to Martim, she feels understood and they become spiritually more mature and closer to each other but there is no physical intimacy: ñMas depois a imagem que ele tinha da mulher se tornava de algum modo tão familiar como se ele tivesse tocado em seu corpo todo, ou como se ambos ao sol não tivessem se dado conta de que vários anos de intimidade se haviam passadoò (*Ibid*, p. 275). [But then, the image he had of the woman became somehow familiar as if he had touched all her body, or as if both in the sun had not realized that several years of intimacy had gone by]. In the end, after having gone through experience and freedom, Martim feels nauseated at being human (*Ibid*, p. 307) and believes he has come full circle and fallen into the same trap (*Ibid*, p. 211-12). The problematization of his crime, redemption, ascetic development and sense of failure become central again. Martim had to create his soul (*Ibid*, p. 299) in a world where, using the authorôs words living is an open wound. The body and the sexually defined body are basic elements but always starting points for the (usually failed) attainment of some impalpable essence, which can be included in the concept of transcendence. The physical side of male and female identities is not considered in its complementary interaction as in *To the Lighthouse* but as the illustration of two different experiences of the central question of ñbeingò in human nature. But in both novels we grow from a sexed body socially defined to a visionary body reached through art in *Mrs Dalloway* and through language in *A Maçã no Escuro*.

The relationship between body and transcendence has been analysed here from the point of view of gender. The body/work connections between Woolf and Lispector could, nevertheless, be also explored in other areas as the symbolism of androgyny (*Orlando, a Biography* and *Uma Aprendizagem ou o Livro dos Prazeres*) or the phenomenology of perception. In this case, intercorporeality between bodies and things, between human body and world, is present, through different forms, in Virginia Woolfôs *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

and Clarice Lispectorôs *A Paixão segundo G. H.*(1964). Here, we have not the body imprisioned in social roles or the visionary, immaterial body, which projects suppressed images, but a body which builds the understanding of existence through the experience of perception. In both novels the manifest, the objects and non-human phenomena are used as a starting point to establish coherence and continuity in narrative, through the exploration of a language which draws them near and away from the human phenomena.

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